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SUBJECT: ANGOLA OPTIMISTIC THAT ITS ELECTIONS WON'T MIRROR KENYA'S

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Angola is moving ahead toward September legislative elections. Catch-up voter registration is slated for April and May. CIPE, the inter-ministerial body carrying out the voter registration, will provide the National Election Commission (CNE) a map with proposed locations for all polling stations as well as detailed information on the state of the nation's infrastructure system and locations of the populace, before CIPE dissolves itself, leaving the CNE to conduct the elections. Government ministers involved in the electoral process and USAID's democracy/governance partners are optimistic that the elections will, in fact, occur in September and will be free from any orchestrated violence or vote rigging. The biggest variable in the election outcome is how citizens who perceive themselves as failing to benefit from Angola's economic boom will conduct themselves in the election process: will they stay home; cast spoiled ballots; vote for anybody but the ruling MPLA; or, vote for the ruling party for old-times sake? The tragic post-election events in Kenya cast a pall over the elections process in Angola, though observers here cite many reasons why a Kenya-like situation would not unfold here. Nonetheless, the Embassy will engage political actors to make sure they draw the right lessons from Kenya: the elections in Angola must be as credible and transparent as possible. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) Angola continues to proceed apace toward legislative elections this September. Although a few skeptics remain among independent Angolan observers, the prevailing mood is that the elections will indeed take place on September 5 and/or 6, as President Dos Santos announced Dec. 27, 2007 (Reftel A)). Edeltrudes Costa, Vice-Minister of Territorial Administration and responsible for "electoral issues," briefed Ambassador Mozena on Feb 8 that the election process remains on track. He explained that the CIPE (Interministerial Commission for the Electoral Process), which he chairs, is entering the final phases of its engagement in the election process, after which it will be disbanded. In March CIPE will launch a nationwide civic education campaign to inform the population that those who failed to register during last year's registration campaign and those who since then have or will turn 18 before the September elections should register during the planned April-May catch-up registration period. He said CIPE expects to add 300,000 - 400,000 new registrants to the electoral rolls, which already number over 8 million. Costa said the CIPE will culminate its work once it provides the National Election Commission (CNE) with a map designating the proposed locations of the polling stations (estimated by the CNE president to number nearly 10,000 - reftel B.) Costa clarified that the actual conduct of the elections will be solely the responsibility of the CNE.

¶3. (SBU) Costa recognized that the logistics of conducting the elections are daunting, opining that the CNE would need two days to carry them out. He added that President Dos Santos, too, appreciates that logistical considerations will necessitate a two-day election period. He said Dos Santos in his election

announcement was more concerned about these logistical realities than he was about the letter of the law, which indicates that elections should be held in a single day. He did not offer how this inconsistency could be resolved. He noted that if the GRA were to try to hold the elections in a single day and then failed, the international community, the political opposition, and civil society would immediately accuse the GRA of fraud. Since the CIPE will have conducted two nationwide registration campaigns, Costa added, it would know best the logistical challenges the CNE will confront in conducting the balloting. The Vice-Minister said the CIPE will convey its vast knowledge of the state of Angola's infrastructure and the precise whereabouts of the population to the CNE, so the latter can use this in devising its own logistical plans for the elections.

14. (SBU) Looking ahead, Costa declared that presidential elections will "definitely" be held in 2009. Beyond that, he said local elections will be held in 68 pilot municipalities in 2010, expanding by 2012 to include all 163 municipalities. Yet to be determined is whether elections for Angola's 554 "comuna," districts within municipalities, will also be held by 2012 or deferred until later. (Note: immediately prior to the meeting with Costa, the ministry's other Vice-Minister, Luis de A. da Mota Liz, who is responsible for decentralization, chatted with the Ambassador and sketched the ministry's efforts to decentralize governance from Luanda to the provinces and local levels. He expressed great appreciation for the work done by USAID under the Municipal Development Program, which has been critical to efforts to devolve governance to levels closer to the people. Mota Liz, too, noted that elections at the local level would begin in 2010. End Note)

15. (SBU) Assessing the upcoming elections through a political lens, Costa said the greatest concern from the perspective of the ruling MPLA party is voter absenteeism. The Vice-Minister's concern echoes

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that of a prominent MPLA parliamentary leader who told the Ambassador at a dinner gala February 1 that the MPLA knows it can defeat the political opposition handily ... the only issue is voter turnout. He added that the MPLA is aware that many citizens are dissatisfied with their quality of life and believe that the country's explosive economic growth (in macro terms) has not benefited them. The MPLA leader said his party simply does not know how these voters will conduct themselves on election day. He thought this concern would be even more serious during the 2009 presidential elections, when the voters' ire could be focused on a single individual, than during this year's legislative elections, when he hoped voters would be swayed to participate in the elections on the basis of their "abstract" support for the party itself, which had won the nation's independence and achieved peace.

16. (SBU) During a separate, earlier roundtable discussion with USAID's Democracy and Governance implementing partners, all participants (IRI, NDI, IFES, Search for Common Ground, and UNDP) agreed that the legislative elections will take place in September, as announced. The partners, some of whom have been working election-related issues for years in Angola at the grassroots level, were uniformly optimistic that the elections would be peaceful and free from orchestrated fraud and vote rigging, with two caveats. Spontaneous outbursts of frustration may arise over any logistical breakdowns, and local zealots attempting to commit fraud may cause sporadic incidents, though any such incidents would be limited and not affect the outcome of the elections. The biggest concern shared by the partners was the CNE's ability to carry out the elections logistically. IFES, the only outside body asked by the CNE to assist with election logistics, is working with the CNE to develop an efficient administrative structure that would enable the CNE to make decisions fast and effectively in carrying out election logistics. Such a structure, the IFES representative declared, is critical to the CNE's success in conducting the polling.

17. (SBU) The partners were unsure how voters would express their frustrations over quality of life issues. Some detected malaise and apathy among voters who believe their vote would make no difference; others found many voters excited about having a registration card and the prospect of voting for the first time in their lives. A

third possibility evinced by some of the partners was that voters would go to the polls, but then cast spoiled ballots to register their complaint that the ballot offered no real choices.

18. (SBU) Comment: Democracy in Angola has champions in Vice-Ministers Costa and Mota Liz. Young, bright, determined, both are working hard to make democracy real in Angola. So far, they have an impressive record: The voter registration process that Costa spearheaded was fair, transparent and credible, as even the opposition parties concede. As well, it was a marvel of modern technology performing well in some of southern Africa's most remote and inaccessible locations. Mota Liz has overcome stiff resistance from party stalwarts of an earlier generation in winning Dos Santos's public approval for decentralization of governance, including local elections. The optimism of the two Vice-Ministers and of USAID's Democracy/Governance partners was palpable, though tempered by the unexpected and tragic events unfolding in Kenya in the wake of that country's December 2007 elections. Although all interlocutors were quick to cite reasons why the Kenya experience would not play out in Angola (here tribal antipathy is much less, the people are so sick of conflict they would refuse to take to the streets, opposition leaders are not inclined toward violence), Kenya nonetheless casts a pall here. The Embassy will work to ensure that Angola's political actors draw the right lessons from Kenya: to make the elections as credible and transparent as possible. End comment

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